

Commencement Exercises
Prairie View A&M University
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Washington, D.C. 20546

Chancellor Hansen, President Pierre, Members of the Graduating Class, and Ladies and Gentlemen: It is a great pleasure for me to be here and to have the opportunity to visit the Prairie View A&M University campus once again. I am especially pleased that both Dr. Arthur Hansen and Dr. Percy Pierre are here and to see them again as well. I have known them both for many years and maybe I should start by telling some stories about your two bosses.

You all know that my most recent employer was NASA but I'll bet that not many of you know that Dr. Hansen also worked for NASA for ten years. I have asked some of my Texas friends whether they really know what they are doing in turning over the higher education system of the State of Texas to two fellows who came from NASA. Maybe we will see to it that we all wind up in orbit, eventually! In any event, you should know that both Dr. Hansen and I know how to do that and we can always keep it in mind as a threat!

I have also worked with Dr. Percy Pierre for many years. I first met him when he was Dean of Engineering at Howard University and then worked together with him for four years in the Pentagon when he was Assistant Secretary of the Army. Two and a half years

ago, he and I had the chance to work together again. Dr. Pierre headed a committee to advise NASA on how to develop better relations with universities such as this one--our country's historically Black institutions of higher education. He and the committee he headed succeeded in developing a plan for NASA whereby we more than doubled the research money going to the Black universities in the past two years--from about \$3 million per year to about \$7 million per year to date. Having done that, Dr. Pierre then turned around and came here to see to it that some of this money is well spent! I hope that he can escape the inquisition that is bound to come from the press as to how this all works. In any event, I am most pleased that he is here because NASA, in the next few years, will spend more than \$1 million to support basic research on this campus. Personally, I can think of no one better equipped than Dr. Pierre to lead this effort in the search for new knowledge.

I look forward very much to working both with Dr. Hansen and Dr. Pierre to make our higher education system in Texas better than it is today.

As you know, I will shortly be coming to Texas myself to work with the "other" university system. I am told that there is one and I guess I will have to find out, in due course, where it is!

It is entirely fitting, ladies and gentlemen, that I should start my new academic career in Texas here at Prairie View A&M University because I have had a long relationship with this campus. In fact, Prairie View A&M University is the first Texas university that I ever visited--almost 20 years ago in 1965. At the time, I

was a Professor at the University of California and I was asked to give a lecture here. I remember that during my visit I met then-President Dr. Edward B. Evans, and he told me what he had in mind for the institution. Looking around now, 20 years later, much of what he told me then has been achieved. Most of you were just a few years old at the time so that it is probably hard for you to understand the changes that I am talking about. I am sure, however, that some of the older people here remember what things were like 20 years ago and how far we have come.

When I moved to NASA in 1969, to work at NASA's Ames Research Center in California, we established a long and productive relationship with this campus that was developed over the years by two people from the Center who made many visits here, Messrs. John W. Boyd and Willie L. White. Unfortunately, Mr. White is no longer with us since he passed away after a severe illness two years ago. Some of you may remember him and you should know that we are working to establish a scholarship fund to support a student on this campus in his memory.

My business is exploration. In the last three years, we have done much to open new frontiers in exploring the space around us. We have made the Space Shuttle work and it has given us routine access to space. We have gone up and fixed satellites that have failed. We have manufactured valuable pharmaceuticals in space that can be made only in zero gravity. Most important of all, we have expanded human knowledge, and a graduate of one of our historically Black universities, astronaut Dr. Ronald McNair, has stood at the forefront of this effort. What I have learned from my

years in exploration is that people do things, not "they" or "them" or some big organization. It is always some individual who sparks something along. It is also true that individuals can stop things. More than 500 years ago, the Chinese had a flourishing trade with people in East Africa. They built ships that were 10 times as large as those that Columbus had and they had an Admiral, Chen Ho, who was the spark plug of this enterprise. On one of his expeditions, Chen Ho had more than 60 ships with a total of more than 20,000 people in the crews. Then, in the year 1430, the Emperor died. The new Emperor thought that exploration and trade were both evil and he stopped the whole thing cold. In order to enforce this, the Emperor even decreed that no one could build a ship with more than two masts! Not only did the Emperor stop travel, he stopped the technology that made it possible! Imagine how far we could get today if we could build airplanes or spaceships with only one engine!

I think the lesson is clear and the message is simple. Be a starter rather than a stopper. Chen Ho is remembered still today by people interested in exploration, but the name of the Emperor who stopped him is forgotten. You can also start things that will change the world and that, I think, is the important message.

Twenty-one years ago, a very great American, who was also a great starter, stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and talked about his dreams. You all remember what he said. He was speaking on the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and he started by quoting Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its

creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal." And, in quoting Jefferson, Dr. Martin Luther King gave us all a new vision. He recognized that his dream was not only for him and for his people but for all Americans. He said, "I say to you, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream."

We have made progress in fulfilling Dr. King's vision, but we still have a long way to go. As you go now to pursue your lives, to use and apply what you have learned here, remember Dr. King's dream. It is the American dream, and as long as we remember that and work to fulfill it, then the United States of America will remain the greatest nation in the world. Thank you and Godspeed.